

**REMARKS**

Reconsideration and withdrawal of all grounds of rejection are respectfully requested in light of the following remarks. Claims 1-3 remain pending herein.

(1) Claims 1 – 3 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) as allegedly being anticipated by Kleihorst et al. (U.S. 6,498,815 hereafter “Kleihorst”). Applicants respectfully traverse this ground of rejection.

It is respectfully submitted that the U.S. filing date of Kleihorst is Feb. 13 1999. However, the present invention claims priority from EP 98204149.3 filed December 7, 1998. Priority has been properly claimed and the priority document indicated as received by the U.S.P.T.O. Therefore, Kleihorst has been antedated as a reference. The date of Kleihorst’s foreign filing is immaterial for purposes of a rejection under 35 U.S.C. §102(e), please see *In re Hilmer*, 359 F.2d 859, 875, 149 USPQ 480, 493 (CCPA 1966).

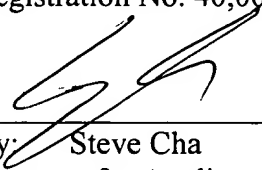
Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that all grounds of rejection under 35 U.S.C. §102(e) have been overcome. Reconsideration and withdrawal of this ground of rejection are respectfully requested.

For all the foregoing reasons, it is respectfully submitted that all the present claims are patentable in view of the cited references. A Notice of Allowance is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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Date: January 7, 2004

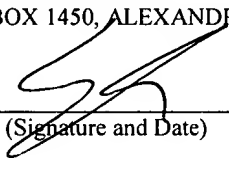
  
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